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17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

The experimental project attempts to determine whether early admission to school can overcome barriers to learning which environmental factors seem to impose. A deprived child often does not receive attention, affection, or guidance within his home. The young child should be helped to develop a wholesome self-concept, to acquire the drive to learn, and to develop interests and capabilities.

Two project centers were operational in February through June 1963. Evaluation of the first five months indicates that early enrichment may surmount some of the barriers to learning imposed by environmental factors. Tests revealed highly significant gains; both teachers and parents identified growth in areas such as use of language, visual and auditory discrimination skills, getting along well with others, better communication with both peers and adults, and use of materials such as paint and scissors.

Through careful record keeping and cooperative planning, the program is designed to provide continuity throughout the child's education. Attempts to promote parental understanding of the growth and development of children and of their role as parents have included home visits by teachers, meetings for parents planned in relation to questions raised by them, and individual conferences in which teachers sought the parents' evaluation of their children's learning. Volunteers to assist the teaching staff were recruited from various community agencies. They brought a wide variety of experiences and interests to the project.

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Early School Admissions Project

Baltimore City Public Schools

Promising Practices

I. Early Admission of Children to the School Program

It is believed that patterns of learning and of personality development are fairly well established for most individuals before the end of the earliest years of school. If this is true, foundations for vital attitudes, habits, and knowledge originate in the pre-school experiences of children. In order to develop a wholesome self-concept, to acquire the drive to learn, and to develop interests and capabilities, the young child needs to be assured of security and affection, to be involved in experiences which arouse his curiosity and extend his horizons, and to be guided in developing his interests. Ideally, the child of pre-school age would receive attention, affection, and guidance within his home environment. But for many children the ideal never becomes a reality.

A multitude of circumstances may damage the developmental patterns of children. Parents may have little time to spend with their children due to illness in the home, the presence of a large number of siblings with whom parental support and love must be shared, or the necessity for full-time employment. Perhaps death, desertion, separation, divorce, or illegitimacy have thrown the full burden of parenthood upon one parent who is also the sole breadwinner for the family. Poor family relationships or emotional disturbance may have created an unwholesome atmosphere in which a child must grow and develop. Migrancy may bring disorganization and instability into the lives of families. The child from marginal social and economic circumstances frequently experiences

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developmental problems as a result of limitations imposed by his environment. For these children, vital aspects of growing and learning cannot or are not provided by the home, and must, therefore, be provided through some other medium.

The Baltimore City Public Schools, by means of an experimental project, are attempting to determine whether early admission to school can overcome any of the barriers to learning which environmental factors seem to impose. The project is a $330,000 three-year educational program financed jointly by the Baltimore City Public Schools and the Ford Foundation. Attempts will be made to measure both immediate and long-range effects of the program.

Two project centers became operational in February, 1963. Thirty children were identified for participation in each of the two centers, and twenty-eight children in each school were still enrolled in the program in June, 1963. Longitudinal studies will be conducted to assess the long-term effect of early school admissions upon the achievement and rate of progress of these pupils as they participate in the regular school program. However, evaluation of the first five months of the program reveals findings which indicate immediate values and which support the hypothesis that early enrichment of children's experiences may surmount some of the barriers to learning imposed by environmental factors.

A. Tests revealed highly significant gains on the part of the children, both as individuals and as a group.

The Columbia Mental Maturity Test and a Verbal Maturity Scale were administered to each child prior to entry into the program and again at the end of five months in the program. Group gains on both tests were highly significant.

Table I

Early School Admissions Program, 1962-63
Differences in Mean Scores Between Initial and Post-Test
Columbia Mental Maturity Scale

School	N	Mean Score Initial Test	Mean Score Post Test	Gain
66	28	25	45	20 points
240	28	22	39	17 points

Table II

Early School Admissions Program, 1962-63
Differences in Mean Scores Between Initial and Post-Test
Verbal Maturity Scale

School	N	Mean Score Initial Test	Mean Score Post Test	Gain
66	28	24	39	15 points
240	28	32	41	9 points

Table III

Early School Admissions Program, 1962-63

Statistical Significance of Differences Between Initial and Post-Test Columbia Mental Maturity Scale

		Means							
							Test of Significance*		
School	N	M_1	Std. Error M_1	M_2	Std. Error M_2	Std. Error Diff. of Means M_2-M_1	t	p	Interpretation
#66	28	25.11	2.54	45.04	2.76	2.26	7.55	<.001	Highly significant
#240	28	21.68	2.49	38.68	2.53	2.41	7.06	<.001	Highly significant

*t.05 = 1.70

Table IV

Statistical Significance of Differences Between Initial and Post-Test Verbal Maturity Test

		Means							
							Test of Significance*		
School	N	M_1	Std. Error M_1	M_2	Std. Error M_2	Std. Error Diff. of Means M_2-M_1	t	p	Interpretation
#66	28	24.61	2.13	39.21	1.74	1.56	9.34	<.001	Highly significant
#240	28	31.57	2.98	41.04	2.38	1.98	4.79	<.001	Highly significant

*t.05 = 1.70

The project testing program is described in detail, pp. 77-90, An Early School Admissions Project, Progress Report, 1962-63.

B. Teachers have identified definite gains on the part of children in:

1. understanding and using language
2. developing skills in auditory discrimination
3. developing skills in visual discrimination
4. developing skills in using materials (paint, scissors, etc.)
5. working and playing with others
6. pursuing individual interests with less support from adults
7. caring for personal needs with less assistance from adults
8. following directions
9. participating in "new" activities

The kinds and degrees of observable growth on the part of individual children are documented by a variety of records maintained by the staff. These records have consisted of:

1. Maturity Profile, An Evaluative Scale for Four to Six Year Olds - a scale, developed by the Elementary Division of the Baltimore Public Schools, consisting of thirty-one items which guide a teacher in estimating levels of maturity of children in relation to various aspects of physical, mental, social, and emotional development.
2. Check lists - devices to indicate progress in vocabulary and language development, number understandings, visual discrimination, auditory discrimination, and use of materials.
3. Folders of children's work
4. Anecdotal records - recordings of factual information describing behavior and

conversation of children which, over a period of time, reveal trends in physical, social, emotional and mental development.

C. Parents have identified gains on the part of children. At least 70% of the parents indicated that they felt their children had shown marked progress in their ability to:

1. "get along better" with other children
2. talk to adults
3. use more words to express ideas
4. use materials

Parent evaluation occurred during parent-teacher conferences, informal school visits, and small group meetings. Parents were impressed by the desire on the part of their children to come to school. Attendance for the five month period averaged 84% for one center and 85% for the other.

D. Kindergarten teachers who received project children noted evidences of growth.

1. There were no "first-week-of-school" adjustment problems.
2. A minimum of time was consumed in establishing routine procedures.
3. Children expressed themselves more readily and at a more advanced level than typical kindergarten entrants in the given community
4. Children were eager to participate in activities that were new for them. (This is not typically true of new entrants to kindergarten in the schools concerned.)

Plans to further refine evaluation include:

1. Establishment of control groups.
2. Comparisons of kindergarten records of project children with records of children representing both deprived and non-deprived groups.

3. Comparisons of records of experiences, language understanding, and language usage of project and non-project kindergarten children.

II. Attempts to establish a foundation for continuity of experiences

A. Articulation of the program has been planned so experiences which follow those developed in the project will extend rather than duplicate. We are attempting to safeguard continuity by means of:

1. Records of Educational Experiences

a. Each teaching team maintains a daily plan book in which are recorded the major aspects of the program for each day. This record provides an overview of the instructional program of a given center.

b. Recorded long-range plans provide a summary of major content areas developed with a group of children. These records indicate content, vocabulary, skills, and teaching materials which have constituted educational experiences.

c. Detailed descriptions of selected learning experiences are being amassed. Descriptions are prepared for experiences that are experimental in nature or that pertain to an area of special emphasis. Tape recordings are made of these lessons also. This technique provides a means for analyzing and evaluating teaching-learning situations.

d. Each teaching team maintains records of trips, lists of resource personnel, and other enrichment experiences.

2. Intervisitation, joint staff meetings and cooperative planning among project staff and staff members of the early elementary division in the project schools

3. Supervision and coordination of project and early elementary experiences by the Project Coordinator

B. Attempts are also being made to foster the continuity of vital experiences in the lives of children who otherwise might not seek such experiences. For example, where school libraries and/or public libraries are readily

available to the school, definite plans are made for weekly visits to the library for short story hour sessions, to provide opportunities to use the books available in the library, and to acquaint children with borrowing procedures.

Librarians report that project children are visiting the library with parents and older brothers and sisters who have not previously frequented the library.

Library visits will be planned systematically also at kindergarten and first grade levels.

III. Attempts to promote parental understanding of the growth and development of children and the roles of parents

A. Home visits have been identified as a chief means of relating to parents. Home visits by staff teams seem to elicit greater response from parents than do meetings held at school. During home visits, parents seem more inclined to devulge necessary information, ask more questions, and express their concerns.

B. Meetings for parents have been planned in relation to questions raised by large numbers of parents. Parents tend to reject meetings which do not deal with their immediate concerns.

C. Teachers involved parents on an individual basis in the evaluation of their children's learning. Although ideas were expressed differently, parents and teachers identified similar kinds of growth.

D. During the course of the first five months of the project, the development of desirable working relationships between parents and staff was evidenced by the following developments.

1. Attendance at parent meetings improved. In one school average monthly attendance grew from 26% to 50%. (50% of the parents were employed full or part time in this situation.) In another school, average monthly attendance was raised from 33% to 78%.

2. As the semester progressed, parents began to extend invitations for home visits.

3. Comments and responses of children indicated that parents were attempting to follow-through

at home as a result of suggestions proposed by staff members during conferences or parent meetings.

IV. Attempts to augment and increase the effectiveness of the project staff through the involvement of volunteer personnel

A. Volunteer Recruitment

Volunteers were recruited from the membership of three community agencies: The Baltimore Council of Parent Cooperatives, The Baltimore Section of the National Council of Jewish Women, and The Young Women's Christian Association. Personnel from each agency worked closely with the project coordinator in relation to the volunteer program and accepted responsibility for recruitment and screening of members of their respective service groups who were interested in working with the project in a volunteer capacity. Twenty-nine persons were identified to serve as volunteers on either a regular or substitute basis. Table V indicates the variety of experiences which existed in the backgrounds of the volunteer personnel and which had helped them develop some readiness for working with project children and their parents.

Table V
Volunteers ESA Project - 1962-63

Volunteer Classification	Number
College Graduates	19
Teaching Experience	18
Work with children other than teaching	29
Cooperative Nursery	10
Scouts	9
Summer Camp	4
Class Mother	1
Hospital Situation	3
Work with adults	23
Special Interests	
Music	7
Art	2
Dramatics	3
Literature	5

B. Inservice Training

1. Staff Orientation

In preparation for working in the project, the entire staff, including volunteer personnel, participated in a series of orientation meetings. These meetings were directed toward helping the staff acquire better understandings of

a. the goals and organization of the project

b. the problems and needs of disadvantaged children and their families

c. the team approach to planning and teaching

d. possible curriculum content

e. record keeping

f. initial work with parents

g. the relationship of the project to the total school situation

Each of the areas of concern identified above served as the basis for staff meetings at different times throughout the year.

Opportunities were provided for staff members to visit in the project schools in order to

a. become acquainted with personnel who relate significantly to the staff of the project center (principal, vice-principal, counselor, social worker, teachers of kindergarten and first grade)

b. become aware of the facilities available

c. plan together as a team for the initial phases of work with children

2. On-going Inservice Program

A program of staff inservice education will be implemented throughout the duration of the project. Total staff meetings, including volunteers, are scheduled once a month; other staff members meet on an average of once a week. Meetings may involve staff members of a given center only or may provide opportunities for staff members of several centers to jointly consider common concerns. Format of a meeting and the staff members involved are determinded by the purpose for the meeting. It is not unusual for members of the regular school staff to attend a project staff meeting, when the subject to be discussed concerns them or would be of interest to them.

C. Development of the volunteer's roles and contributions to the program

During the school year 1962, 1963, volunteer staff members made invaluable contributions to the work of each center. They assisted the professional staff by

1. organizing instructional materials
2. helping children with dressing and toileting

3. assisting with routines of snack, lunch, and play periods

4. acquainting the children with a variety of musical instruments, innumerable pets, a wide range of literature and samples of plant life

5. identifying worthwhile field trips

6. developing warm contacts with individual children

7. maintaining anecdotal records

V. Attempts to better coordinate work with Community Agencies

Representatives from a variety of community agencies serve as an Advisory Committee for the Early School Admissions Project. Committee meetings serve to keep community personnel informed concerning progress toward project goals, new developments, and problems which need to be resolved.

Examples of specific assistance extended by agency representatives are:

1. Persons were suggested who might qualify for positions in the project.

2. Staff members were directed to printed materials and agency personnel that might prove helpful in supplying needed information. For example, the coordinator was directed to personnel of the Urban Renewal and Housing Administration who were able to specify which areas in a given community would be demolished to prepare for urban renewal. Time schedules for demolition were also indicated. In another instance, agency personnel assisted in locating children whose families had been moved to various sections of the city.

3. Personnel from community agencies assisted in identifying children who might be eligible for the project program.

4. Provisions were made for project staff members to be involved in activities of various community agencies. As a result, the staff was able to acquire a greater volume of information and to benefit from the ideas and reactions of personnel considering a common problem in terms of varied frames of reference.